

**EXPLORING THE GAP BETWEEN TEACHER CERTIFICATION  
AND PERMANENT EMPLOYMENT IN ONTARIO:  
AN INTEGRATIVE LITERATURE REVIEW**

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The following integrative literature review illuminates the perceptible time gap that currently exists for new Ontario teachers graduating and moving from teacher preparation programs to permanent members of the Ontario teaching community. At a time of oversupply of teachers, many new teachers within Ontario and beyond its borders become occasional teachers and must wait several years before gaining permanent teaching employment. Due to this extended wait time for a permanent contract position, it is important to explore just how occasional teachers remain prepared. Herein the question of whether new teachers are prepared for a permanent position after a period of occasional teaching is addressed.

### **Introduction**

There is a widening time frame (gap) between the completion of teacher preparation programs and permanent employment as a teacher, especially in Ontario. Indeed, “the teacher surplus in Ontario is now so large that half the new education graduates will face five or more years of job searching to gain full employment as teachers” (Ontario College of Teachers, 2013, back cover). Opportunities for new teachers are reduced because there are fewer potential students to fill schools: “Most Ontario DSBs [District School Boards] have fewer students and schools than they used to” (Miller, 2011, p. 39). Also reducing the employment opportunities for new teachers is the fact that teachers are not retiring as early as they once had, and more retired

teachers are *double-dipping* by securing places on occasional teacher lists ahead of newly qualified teachers.

New teachers frequently begin their careers as occasional teachers, and evidence will demonstrate that occasional teachers are not provided with satisfactory professional development in order to remain current during this time. In Ontario, it is likely several years before newly certified teachers gain permanent employment as teachers, and, therefore, it seems important to ask, Are they still current and prepared?

### *Purpose and Objectives*

The purpose of this review is to examine and explore via available literature, the obstacles newly certified teachers who become occasional teachers encounter while attempting to remain prepared to teach, and while waiting for a permanent position within the province of Ontario. We believe it is of the utmost importance to all stakeholders such as school boards that they employ highly qualified and prepared individuals to teach their students. Investigating whether new teachers who become occasional teachers remain prepared to teach after an extended wait time will address a key question in existing literature which focuses primarily on whether new teachers are prepared for their first year of teaching, assuming that they obtain employment immediately after certification.

The objectives are to determine and illuminate via current and available literature, the ways new and occasional teachers remain prepared to teach while they search for permanent employment; to determine if and how occasional teachers are being supported as teachers by the school boards where they are employed; to identify reasons occasional teachers are not prepared to teach; and to recommend ways in which administrators, school boards, and faculties of

education can better prepare new teachers who become occasional teachers for their often inordinate wait time.

## **Background**

More research needs to examine new teacher preparedness (Al-Bataineh, 2009; Authier, 2012; Fennell, 1993; Imbibo & Silvernail, 1999). Today, minimal research exists that examines whether new teachers who become (short term [ST] or long term [LT]) occasional teachers, while waiting for permanent employment, continue to be current and prepared as the years of occasional teaching grow. Currently, many new teachers find themselves on an occasional teachers (supply/substitute) list *waiting* for permanent work. Many remain on occasional teaching lists for years after graduation, hoping for full-time employment. While waiting, a teacher may be called upon to occasionally teach in any subject area and sometimes may be offered a long term occasional position (LTO) to experience “real teaching” over a period of weeks, or months. Real teaching experience according to the Ontario College of Teachers *Transition to Teaching 2013* report includes “establishing climate, covering the full breadth of the curriculum, adapting teaching to varying learning styles, assessment and evaluation, report cards, communicating with parents and so on” (p. 42). However, based on the time between certification and permanent employment school administrators can reasonably question if occasional teachers, who completed their teacher preparation possibly several years earlier, continue to be prepared to fill current permanent teaching positions (Latifoglu, 2014).

## **Integrative Review of Literature**

The goal of the Ontario Ministry of Education, school boards, administrators, and educators is to provide students with the best education possible. Indeed, “the preparation of teachers is of vital importance to our nation’s educational system. If we are to ensure our students the best possible education, we must provide them with teachers who have been well prepared” (Al-Bataineh, 2009, p. 236). This requires ensuring that those who complete their teacher certification are properly prepared, but also ensuring that those who become occasional teachers while they wait to become permanent teachers remain current and prepared (Latifoglu, 2014).

According to Pearce (2012), “teachers who have recently graduated from teacher education programs find themselves entering a grim employment market resulting from declining teacher retirement rates since the early 2000s” (p. 6). In Ontario, there were 12,200 new teachers to 4,600 retirements in 2011 (OCT, 2011, p. 2). This problem is province-wide and “few studies have documented the experience of substitute teachers, and even fewer have explored the work in Canadian contexts” (Duggleby & Badali, 2007, p. 23). The focus of most research has been on whether pre-service teachers are prepared (Al-Bataineh, 2009), not on whether they continue to remain prepared while working as occasional teachers, during the wait time between completion of a professional education program and permanent employment. Because the often extended gap in time is such a recent phenomenon, there appears to be limited research that addresses this specific problem: “Increasingly, new Ontario teachers need even greater determination just to get into a classroom as the search for jobs—even part-time supply teaching—grows longer and longer for many of them” (McIntyre, 2011, para. 1).

This wait time can potentially have detrimental effects on new teachers and their preparedness (Latifoglu, 2014). If new teachers become (ST/LT) occasional teachers and are not provided with support and professional development by the boards they work for, and if they are unable to participate in professional development on their own, there may be reason for concern on the part of administrators that, following the gap, occasional teachers are no longer current or prepared to assume the responsibilities of a permanent classroom teacher.

Pearce (2012) suggests it is essential to provide new teachers with considerable support, including opportunities for mentoring, along with formal and informal learning, as “teachers tend to improve their practice very early in their career. . . . Beginning teachers do an enormous amount of learning that contributes to a competent professional practice, before settling in to their desired practices” (p. 31). A problem lies with our current situation as new Ontario teachers are often occasional teachers (ST/LT) for several years following training and certification. This gap before permanent employment is actually more serious since many occasional teachers do not have support from programs such as the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP), which is only offered once teachers have either a permanent position or are filling a long term occasional (LTO) position.

## **Method**

The research approach used herein is known as an integrative review (IR), which is a form of research that “reviews, critiques, and synthesizes representative literature on a topic in an integrated way” (Torraco, 2011, p. 356). Its purpose is to make “a significant and value-added contribution” to a particular field (Torraco, 2011, p. 358). The outcome is not a synthesis alone but rather a construction of new contexts, positions, and perspectives. Our IR (empirical), one of

three possible modes of IR, caused us to gather, examine, and distill literature related to our topic (critical review of quantitative or qualitative studies on a particular topic, with analysis of results . . .) (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005).

The IR of literature began by accessing university library websites to search e-resources under the education category. Numerous databases were then used to search the many terms and descriptors, such as, “new teachers,” “newly qualified teacher preparedness,” “beginning teacher preparedness,” “substitute teacher,” “occasional teacher,” “casual teacher,” “supply teacher,” “teacher employment,” “occasional teacher professional development,” and “oversupply of teachers.” This step follows the advice of Soares et al., (2014) who speak to methodological rigor in the IR, suggesting,

. . . in regard to the research question, the reviewer should guarantee the appropriateness of the keywords or concepts, and the methodology used to verify whether the studies selected respond to the research question. Two evaluators are required for the data codification phase. . . . (p. 335)

Each of us gathered 56 pertinent articles and research, which was retrieved through databases such as Education Research Complete, ERIC, the Google Scholar search engine, and CBCA Complete. Twelve of the articles and research papers that were located did not pertain to the current topic of study either because they were antiquated (out of date before 2000), or did not directly address the specific issues of our study. Seventeen resources were deemed less than scholarly (rigorous) or too different from the Ontario context to be included. Once the 27 articles were considered to be appropriate, they were read, analyzed, and coded to identify specific themes related to the topic of study. The specific themes identified were the preparedness of newly certified teachers (9), the lived experience of occasional teachers (6), formal and informal learning (8), support received from schools and boards (7), and reasons why occasional teachers are not prepared for the realities faced by a permanent teacher (5). We also found that some

resources/articles could be linked to more than one theme and that some studies provided similar outcomes/conclusions.

*Preparedness: Newly Certified Teachers*

Over the years, opinions and research have differed as to whether newly certified teachers have been properly prepared for the classroom as well as for all the responsibilities associated with being a permanent classroom teacher. Al-Bataineh (2009) concluded that “literature shows that pre-service teachers encounter most difficulty in trying to make sense of the notions of teaching based on their preparation in the university with the reality they encounter in the classroom” (p. 232). It is important, however, to acknowledge that preparedness is often a relative term, depending on who makes the assessment (Latifoglu, 2014).

Fennell (1993) examined student teachers’ self-evaluations of their preparedness for their teaching internships. The results of the study revealed that “students felt they had been well-prepared for their internships, particularly with regard to planning, questioning, and models of instruction. The one area in which students felt they had not been adequately prepared was classroom management” (as cited in Al-Bataineh, 2009, p. 237). In another study conducted by Mary Faire (1994, as cited in Al-Bataineh, 2009), with regards to teacher preparedness, supervising professors felt “student teachers had not been adequately prepared to plan instruction or express performance objectives, and needed more development opportunities to relate to children, engage in effective classroom management, and develop the overall learning environment” (p. 238).

In the past, new teachers were hired directly after completing their teacher preparation programs and, therefore, were able to implement immediately all the skills and strategies they

had learned in their teacher preparation program (Latifoglu, 2014). It seems likely then, that these new teachers were able to quickly identify their strengths and the ways they were prepared to teach as well as their weaknesses and things they were not prepared for in the field of teaching. Now, because most new teachers do not have their own class of students until several years after the completion of their preparation program, they may be unaware of ways they are and are not prepared until much later (Authier, 2012).

Al-Bataineh (2009) suggests, “pre-service teachers do not spend enough time in the classroom to understand the full extent of teachers’ role and responsibilities” (p. 232). The need for more time in the classroom is one reason why the Ontario Ministry of Education along with universities in Ontario that offer teacher preparation programs have, starting September 2015, decided to extend teaching programs from one year to two. Pollock (2010b) recommends that new teachers “require the most support and seek this support on a number of fronts: classroom management, instructional strategies, accessing actual work, networking, and subject and discipline content” (p. 20). Perhaps increasing the length of time spent in the classroom during pre-service training as well as providing programs such as NTIP will enhance new teachers’ preparedness. In Cherubini’s (2009) study, newly certified teachers reported that they

“... felt so much more confident” because of their professional competence in the classroom and in the school community were validated not only by the autonomy afforded to make their own decisions, but by the fact that such decisions were respected by their colleagues. (p. 190)

### *Life as an Occasional Teacher*

Recent Ontario provincial legislations states:

a teacher is an occasional teacher if he or she is employed by a board to teach as a substitute for a teacher or temporary teacher who is or was employed by

the board in a position that is part of its regular teaching staff including continuing education teachers. (Section 1(1.1) Education Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. E.2) (Government of Ontario, 2010)

This provincial legislation does suggest the short term occasional (STO) is a *substitute* and the long term occasional (LTO) is a *temporary teacher*. These distinctions are key to our understanding of the occupational entry points for teachers in Ontario. Recent Ontario regulation

274/12 was filed by the provincial government on September 11, 2012 under the Education Act. The regulation establishes steps all publicly funded school boards are required to follow when hiring for long-term occasional (LTO) and new permanent teaching positions. Under the regulation, school boards must establish and maintain two occasional teacher lists: A roster of occasional teachers; a long-term occasional teachers' list. An occasional teacher's ranking on the roster is based on seniority. The roster must include the names of all occasional teachers hired by the school board, the day each occasional teacher was placed on the roster, and a summary of each occasional teacher's teaching experience. School boards are required to update their rosters regularly. (Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, 2012, p. 1)

The development of regulation 274/12 was motivated by supposed unfair hiring practices (nepotism) and general disorganization when it came to hiring from a pool of occasional teachers. However, regulation 274/12 means that a new teacher must be on the roster for 10 months and have taught for 20 days therein before being able to move to the LTO roster (seniority list) (Ferguson, Benzie, & Rushowy, 2013). This has created more problems as some argue that the best teacher is not always hired and instead those only from the LTO roster with seniority could be considered for a new permanent position (Ferguson et al., 2013). Specifically, teachers must have:

- completed a long-term assignment in a school of the board that was at least four months long and in respect of which the teacher has not received an unsatisfactory evaluation;
- the required qualifications for the position;
- the highest ranking under section 2; and
- agreed to be interviewed. (O. Reg. 274/12, s. 7 (3))

This reality coupled with the fact that the employment market for new teachers is already saturated caused the Ontario College of Teachers *Transition to Teaching 2013* report to conclude:

Most new teachers are in daily supply jobs for increasing durations. Daily supply teaching now comprises some of the early months of teaching careers for the majority of new Ontario teachers. Many of them are confined to supply teaching for years. (p. 42)

Ontario is not alone: British Columbia, Nova Scotia, and New South Wales have also experienced an oversupply of teachers. In British Columbia, “there are roughly 3,300 certified teachers for 900 teaching jobs in the province every year” (Hyslop, 2014). In Nova Scotia, in 2012, “the Department of Education published a report that showed that the annual supply of newly certified teachers far-outweighs the annual demand (NS Teacher Supply and Demand, 2012)” (Saunders, 2013). Pietsch and Williamson (2007) found, “today’s beginning teachers enter the profession in an uncertain and fragmented employment . . . characterised by short term contract work and successive rather than continuous appointments” (p. 16).

For newly certified teachers, just getting on an occasional teachers list is the major first step towards future permanent employment. Occasional teaching can provide the opportunity for new teachers to get to know the schools, staff, and students within their school board. According to *Building Futures: A Day of Learning and Resources for Teacher Candidates: Occasional Teaching*, there are many benefits to beginning one’s teaching career as an occasional teacher. Occasional teaching provides a “good introduction to teaching—exposure to a variety of grade levels and subjects; opportunities to meet administrators, teachers, communities, and students; occasion to recognize different teaching and administrative styles, classroom management techniques” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). Although occasional teachers “will not necessarily be able to provide the differentiated activities expected of regular class teachers . . .

this does not mean that the children are not provided with quality learning experiences” (Daminanos, 2012, p. 33). One must remember that occasional teachers are trained professionals who have been hired by school boards to provide a learning experience for their students while the regular classroom teacher is unavailable (Authier, 2012).

The Ontario College of Teachers’ *Transition to Teaching 2013* report found, “some teachers report that daily supply roles help them ease into the teaching role. They learn from the organization, lesson-planning and varying styles of the experienced teachers they replace” (p. 42). By working as occasional teachers, newly certified teachers have the opportunity to work in their chosen profession while acquiring new skills and to have a variety of teaching experiences while they wait for permanent employment.

When faced with an oversupply of teachers, the New South Wales (NSW) Department of Training and Education claimed that being an occasional teacher is an appropriate way to begin a career: “For teachers awaiting permanent appointment, casual and temporary employment provides great opportunities to further develop professional skills” (Pietsch & Williamson, 2009, p. 2). Many occasional teachers would agree with Daminanos’ (2012) findings that “their line of work should be a pre-requisite experience for all regular teachers prior to securing a full-time contract, as it provides an all-encompassing knowledge of pedagogical skills and instructional functions” (p. 122). This is not to say, however, that the experience one gains as an occasional teacher will adequately prepare one for the realities of having a class of one’s own; it is indeed very different (Authier, 2012).

Occasional teachers face many unique and contradictory expectations for the work they do. In a somewhat idealistic sense, occasional teachers must assume the responsibilities of the regular classroom teacher in order to minimize disruption of the normal teaching and learning

environment due to the regular teacher's absence. Damianos (2012) found that when the roles of the occasional teacher and that of the regular classroom teacher are compared, the role of the occasional teacher demands "levels of competence, confidence and flexibility more complex than those needed by permanent teachers" (p. 31).

Other researchers are not so optimistic or positive with respect to the work of occasional teachers: Curtis (2002) found it "fairly self-evident that supply teachers aren't as effective as permanent teachers. They need time to get used to a school's ethos. . . . And they don't last that long in one school" (p. 23). Perhaps the most accurate and balanced assessment of occasional teachers' work is simply that occasional teachers experience life in the classroom differently than permanent teachers. Damianos (2012) explains: "Existing in a different realm of experience, substitute teachers' interests and practices are frequently perceived in different and often conflicting terms to those concerning permanent teachers" (p. 24). Because they often have little or no knowledge of the school culture, occasional teachers "have a difficult time entering into the life and work of the school" (Duggleby & Badali, 2007, p. 25).

*Structural constraints.* Occasional teachers face structural constraints that limit their opportunities to teach; as well, their "involvement with students' learning can only be partial and limited, considering . . . the time constraints under which they operate" (Damianos, 2012, p. 26). By virtue of the occasional teacher's transitory position, effective teaching performance is perplexing, since "even the most dedicated teacher cannot succeed in the classroom without sufficient information about the school, students, and classroom practices" (Duggleby & Badali, 2007, p. 30). Occasional teachers appear to never fully understand the job of a regular teacher, partially because of their lack of access to other professional teachers (Latifoglu, 2014). Duggleby and Badali (2007) contend that "learning is socially situated, and learning . . .

to do a job, can only take place when there is social interaction among all involved parties” (p. 24).

In Damianos’s (2012) research on the professional discourse of occasional secondary teachers, several occasional teachers spoke about their concerns “of lost or atrophied teaching skills resulting from the implementation of another’s planned activities, as opposed to one’s own” (p. 64). Occasional teachers do not have “as many responsibilities as the regular teacher: meeting with parents, making sure children are attaining the learning objectives and structuring the curriculum so you fit everything into these objectives that they should be learning” (Damianos, 2012, p. 102). In contrast to regular teachers, occasional teachers invest little or no time planning lessons or supervising co-curricular activities and the occasional teachers valued “being relieved of the many demands . . . placed on their full time colleagues” (Damianos, 2012, p. 99).

By far, the most negative finding regarding occasional teaching is the role it plays in causing a loss of skills. Damianos’ (2012) research points to “an erosion of pedagogical skills” for occasional teachers, where one occasional teacher “succinctly summed up the effects on his teaching craft. . . . You start losing your teaching abilities, your creativity, because they are not being practiced” (p. 91). Another occasional teacher “emphasized how the lack of collegial affirmation of one’s teaching abilities could result in feelings of devaluation, defined here again in terms of merely supervising rather than teaching” (Damianos, 2012, p. 93). One of the authors of the present article spent many days as an occasional teacher simply supervising students as they completed worksheets, overseeing computer periods, or showing movies that have been left by the regular teacher.

When Pietsch and Williamson (2009) researched the work of occasional teachers, although the NSW Department of Training and Education made positive endorsements of occasional teaching, the researchers found occasional teaching to be

an inappropriate way in which to launch a teaching career. . . . It is . . . [a] less than optimal means by which newly qualified teachers can build on the knowledge and professional practical skills attained in initial teacher education to develop competency as a teacher. (p. 2)

Occasional teachers, not being permanent members of school staff, most often miss out on professional development or professional learning communities [PLCs] that take place at the school level.

A major obstacle that occasional teachers experience is the indifference by administrators to the occasional teachers' situation. Research by Perkins and Becker (1966, as cited in Damianos, 2012) described occasional teachers as "forgotten insofar as training and orientation are concerned" (p. 28). Pollock (2010b) revealed how

occasional teachers have limited access to formal professional learning, rely heavily on informal learning to support their work and require skills and knowledge that is different from those teachers in full-time permanent teaching positions. Occasional teachers are motivated to seek out informal and formal modes of learning as current professional learning opportunities do not always meet their specific professional development needs. (p. 21)

According to Pollock's (2010a) research, many occasional teachers realized, "to be successful they had to engage in a considerable amount of unpaid work (e.g. volunteering), attend a great deal of informal and formal learning, and eventually accept any and all daily occasional work" (para. 12). Working as an occasional teacher, however, appears to offer little support for preparedness, because experienced teachers often provide mixed reviews of the occasional teachers' work as their replacements. Clifton and Rambaran (1987) found that some teachers did not consider occasional teachers to be professionals. In lesson plan instructions, full-

time teachers frequently instructed occasional teachers to assign “busy work” or to simply re-teach material.

Authier’s (2012) study on the factors that influence the effectiveness and satisfaction of occasional teachers reveals that occasional teachers report feeling less effective the longer they spend working as occasional teachers (p. 30). As paradoxical as this claim seems, Authier (2012) offers the following reasonable explanation:

Perhaps this is because after six or more years as an occasional teacher, some participants have stronger feelings of being “isolated and unaccepted in the schools they frequent” . . . which may make it more difficult to keep up with the changing nature of the classroom. (p. 50)

This lack of confidence and these feelings of ineffectiveness certainly point to the need for support and professional development for occasional teachers during the gap. Authier (2012) also found that “the younger the respondent, the higher they ranked [their] effectiveness” (p. 47). Perhaps this is because younger teachers are more recent graduates from teacher preparation programs, are able to actively apply recently acquired teaching skills, and “believe that they know up-to-date information” (Authier, 2012, p. 51).

### *Formal Learning*

As certified members of the Ontario College of Teachers, all teachers must abide by the *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession*. The standards are (a) commitment to students and student learning, (b) professional knowledge, (c) leadership in learning communities, (d) professional practice, and (e) ongoing professional learning (OCT, 2012). These standards all directly point to the need for lifelong learning and ongoing professional development. This learning and development needs to be practiced by all teachers, including occasional teachers.

Formal learning is one way occasional teachers participate in professional development and continue to remain current and prepared. Pearce (2012) found that many teachers continue with their professional education by enrolling in additional courses and programs such as Additional Qualifications (AQs). These courses add to the teachers' professional qualifications and are a regular source of professional development. Pollock's (2010b) report for the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario on occasional teachers' access to professional learning found "approximately 80% of respondents indicated that they had participated in some form of formal professional development" (p. 17). They participated for a variety of reasons: to network, to gain additional qualifications, to build their resumes, to improve teaching practice, and to learn about board and ministry initiatives and changes. Pollock (2010b) also discovered that "approximately half (46%) of occasional teachers paid for their own formal professional learning opportunities," but it was new teachers that "were more willing to pay for their formal professional learning" (p. 17). In another study, Pollock (2010a) found that new teachers "appeared to participate in substantial amounts of formal learning, motivated by the desire to secure more occasional teaching days or a full-time, permanent teaching position" (para. 18).

In contrast to Pollock's (2010a, 2010b) findings, the *Transition to Teaching 2013* report determined that

daily supply teachers report much lower levels of involvement in school-based professional development such as in-school collaborative learning and school self-evaluation activities. . . . And fewer of them report that they have a mentor or engage in teacher enquiry. The one area of professional development that does not show this gap is enrolment in formal courses. (OCT, 2013, p. 44)

For many occasional teachers, their participation in formal learning demonstrates willingness and an understanding of the need to remain current and prepared during the gap.

### *Informal Learning*

According to Pollock (2010a), “informal learning is an integral part of teaching. New entrants tend to engage in informal learning through either volunteering or while on the job as an occasional teacher” (para. 17). Pollock (2010b) adds, “While most occasional teachers engage in some form of formal professional learning, most of their professional learning comes from informal learning” (p. 19). Informal learning is easy to access and easy to practice. For permanent teachers, informal learning is something that happens on a daily basis through discussions with colleagues and working regularly in the same school environment. However, because the work sites of occasional teachers can literally change every day, “occasional teachers tend to rely more on informal professional learning that often occurs on-line” (Pollock, 2010b, p. 22).

In Pollock’s (2010b) study on occasional teachers’ access to professional development, occasional teachers reported participating in the following types of informal learning: having conversations with other teachers and friends; learning from resource material such as books, professional publications, and academic journals; collecting resources while working as an occasional teacher; using material from the internet; and volunteering in the classrooms (p. 18).

Many newly certified teachers, who at first may not be able to secure work as an occasional teacher, volunteer to get experience and exposure. According to Pearce (2012), new teachers who choose to be volunteers “are major beneficiaries of the experience. . . . Some may categorize this volunteer work as ‘unpaid work for self-benefit’” (p. 23) because of the variety of opportunities it provides. Volunteering leads to a gain in professional knowledge and the “informal learning from volunteer work supplemented prior teacher education” (Pearce, 2012, p.

93). Volunteers in Pearce's (2012) study discussed learning many teaching skills not traditionally taught in teacher training programs, such as

organizational skills (how to physically set-up a classroom, manage a daybook, plan and implement field trips, and effectively use preparation time); teamwork/problem solving/communication skills (working and collaborating with other teachers); budgeting and financial management (planning field trips and facilitating charitable campaigns); interpersonal skills (working with differing personalities of students, teachers, and administrators); health and well-being (their own, and students who have particular disabilities). (p. 99)

Volunteering has been helpful in building professional teaching practice as well as helpful for inexperienced teachers in becoming “better teachers beyond their initial teacher education” (Pearce, 2012, p. 101). Working as a volunteer in a classroom can aid in the type of learning and preparation that does not fall under the notion of professional learning. Volunteers can learn “how schools are organized in Ontario, how to work with other teachers, how to network with other teachers, how to develop marketing skills, or how to understand the culture or social processes within the schools” (Pollock, 2008, p. 85).

In terms of the benefits informal learning provides for volunteers, newly certified, and occasional teachers, Pearce (2012) determines that “in general, it seems as though informal learning has led to the acquisition of explicit and tacit professional knowledge in many areas, including curriculum, . . . pedagogy and classroom management; non-instructional duties related to teaching; and developmental and learning disabilities” (p. 98). Informal learning, it seems, can provide many of the benefits of formal learning without the drawbacks of formal learning, such as cost, missed days of work, and loss of time outside the school day.

### *School and Board Support for Occasional Teachers*

For most schools and school boards in Ontario, the occasional teachers today will become future permanent classroom teachers. For this reason, it would seem important that schools and boards invest in their future teachers, their occasional teachers, by providing them with the support they need and professional development opportunities to keep them up-to-date and prepared for the classroom. Cherubini's (2009) study found that "from a North American perspective, the literature implicitly states that formal and meaningful support for beginning teachers is critical as they move from teacher candidate to teacher professional" (p. 186). Many school systems have evolved the practice of inducting new teachers to provide positive learning cultures. In Ontario,

the New Teacher Induction Program provides support for the early professional growth and development of entrants to a challenging profession. First-year NTIP participants in regular teaching jobs say they experienced a school board orientation (88 per cent), mentoring by an experienced teacher (90 per cent) and a formal evaluation by their school principal (93 per cent). (OCT, 2013, p. 38)

In Pollock's (2010a) study on marginalization and the occasional teacher workforce in Ontario, one interviewee stated she had been offered and attended "professional development sessions for occasional teachers in her local region" provided by the school board she was employed by and the local teachers' union (para. 10). Some school boards, claim to have an open invitation for all occasional teachers to attend professional development sessions. Attendance for occasional teachers on these days, however, is not mandatory because they are not paid, and, therefore, there is often a poor turnout.

School board support, however, does not consistently happen across all boards for all new hires, nor for occasional teachers. Pollock (2010b) claims "occasional teachers have been described as the 'educational bridge' when the classroom teacher is absent. Yet, support for this

group is limited” (p. 21). The *Transition to Teaching 2013* report suggested permanent teachers “are three to 10 times more likely to receive support than are daily supply teachers. And four in 10 daily supply teachers report that they received none of these key types of new teacher in-school support” (OCT, 2013, p. 44). If school boards believe “it is important for occasional teachers to provide effective instruction so that students not lose precious time for learning . . . [and] that all students can receive the education that they deserve,” then it seems reasonable that they must provide learning opportunities and systems of support for occasional teachers (Authier, 2012, p. 9). A school board that does not provide support and professional development for its occasional teachers cannot reasonably expect those teachers to perform well during interviews or to be adequately prepared to take over the responsibilities of a permanent teacher.

The study by Welsch (2001) provides a comprehensive strategy for school boards in their management of occasional teachers including “hiring quality substitutes, maintaining ongoing professional development, performing routine evaluations, furnishing resources and support, providing appropriate salary and benefits, and valuing substitutes as staff members” (p. 374). Some might argue that board resources are already stretched too thin to entertain any new services that do not generate the additional revenue to offset the expenditure. The problem with this argument is that it precludes creative strategies that may solve problems that have not been seen to be problems such as issues involving occasional teachers. A basic question for boards needs to be addressed: How effective are the strategies, policies, and practices in the use of occasional teachers to support student learning? This study of occasional teachers’ preparedness shows that occasional teachers do not appear to generate “serious attention” at the board level, nor at individual schools.

### *Reasons Occasional Teachers Are Unprepared*

The occasional teacher experiences being excluded on a regular basis. This happens whenever there is “a planned absence due to professional development training. . . . Substitute teachers provide the necessary cover while ironically receiving few opportunities for adequate training that addresses their unique needs and experiences” (Damianos, 2012, p. 28). Permanent classroom teachers are given regular opportunities to receive professional development and training to remain current and adequately prepared, yet it doesn’t appear to matter whether the teachers replacing classroom teachers are current or prepared.

Although occasional teachers have been and will continue to be part of every school’s landscape, they appear to suffer from low expectations such as those reported by Clifton and Rambaran (1987):

Substitute teachers are often asked by administration and regular teachers to act as baby-sitters and “keep house” until the “real teacher” gets back. The attitude of some administrators and regular teachers is that the students will not learn anything while the regular teacher is away, so all that a substitute has to do is maintain a reasonable degree of order and discipline. (p. 317)

Regular teachers would normally not be permitted to continue teaching with such poor expectations. Occasional teachers often do not “develop secure identities as teachers, in part because of the uneven support of school personnel and also possibly because of the lack of personal and focused help” (Duggleby & Badali, 2007, p. 31). Many occasional teachers receive low expectations partly because of lack of professional attention. This can be seen when “daily supply teacher professional support deficits are . . . evident in comparing access to school orientation, principal evaluations and mentoring by experienced teachers” (OCT, 2013, p. 44). Occasional teachers need to be aware that their competence can be an issue for regular teachers. Authier (2012) refers to Glatfelter’s (2006) study that found “regular classroom teachers view

occasional teachers as lacking the competence to effectively manage classrooms and to effectively teach the curriculum and use instructional strategies” (p. 13).

Not being part of the regular teaching staff has serious negative consequences for occasional teachers with respect to their own needs for professional development. They are effectively excluded from the schools’ professional development activities for systemic and practical reasons. Systemic obstacles are often not observed by anyone except those who are negatively affected. Some of these obstacles are (a) professional development activities are often scheduled during the daytime hours, (b) activities are planned for the regular teachers and not designed to accommodate others in the sessions, and (c) occasional teachers are not a priority and attend only after all regular teachers are accommodated. Practical reasons include (a) occasional teachers not wanting to lose a day's pay for attending sessions when they would normally cover for the regular teachers attending the activity, (b) not wanting nor able to pay for the professional development training which is free to the regular staff, and (c) not having any guarantee that attending professional development sessions will lead to regular appointment.

An occasional teacher interviewed in Duggleby and Badali’s (2007) study stated that as an occasional teacher “you’re excluded from any conferences or workshops or if there’s room they’ll let you come” (p. 29). The same teacher states that for occasional teachers

it was next to impossible to participate in professional development because they were wait-listed after contract teachers. Making matters worse, most events took place during the day when the substitute teachers may be working for those same teachers who are taking part in professional development.  
(Duggleby & Badali, 2007, p. 30)

In Pollock’s (2010b) report on occasional teachers’ access to professional learning, only 19% indicated that they had not participated in any form of professional learning, and 42% indicated that there were no opportunities for formal professional learning. The remaining 58%

indicated that there were opportunities for professional learning, but for personal reasons they chose not to participate (p. 19). Some of the reasons given for not participating in professional learning include not having enough time, not finding the cost reasonable, not seeing the need to participate in any kind of formal professional learning, not having formal professional learning available for occasional teachers in their area, and not easily accessing information about formal professional learning (Pollock, 2010b, p. 34). Additionally, it is unfortunate for occasional teachers that “professional teacher associations, although theoretically acknowledging the professional membership of substitute teachers, do not include them in professional activities” (Duggleby & Badali, 2007, p. 22).

The Ontario Ministry of Education collaborated with the Ontario College of Teachers and established “a substantial induction program to support new teachers in the first three years of teaching” (Cherubini, 2009, p. 186). The problem with the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) as it exists now is that no parts of it are offered to occasional teachers, who are mostly new teachers. A teacher, therefore, may only be going through the NTIP after having been in the profession for several years because of the current job situation in Ontario.

Given the extensive delay for occasional teachers to be hired as permanent teachers, there is evidence now that “the longer occasional teachers spend working in occasional teaching positions, the lower their job satisfaction . . . [while] gradually decreas[ing] their commitment to the profession” (Authier, 2012, p. 55). Although there is much that boards need to do, Authier (2012) finds, “the literature suggests that improving occasional teacher effectiveness is not just the responsibility of the administration and school boards, but that occasional teachers also play a large role in increasing their own effectiveness” (p. 12).

## **Conclusion**

Herein we illuminate via current and available literature, the ways and extent occasional teachers remain prepared to teach while they search for permanent employment. We realize that occasional teaching is now a two-tier system of seniority, and rosters dictate who may get interviewed for permanent positions. While only LTO teachers can be supported in the NTIP this excludes many STO teachers. STO seems to be less supported as they get less time in schools. Many teacher unions and educational activists are calling for the refinement or erasure of Ontario Regulation 274/12 and even the current Ontario (provincial) government has admitted the regulation is imperfect (Ferguson et al., 2013).

The limited research on the preparedness of newly certified teachers suggests new teachers would benefit from more time spent in the classroom during their teaching training (Al-Bataineh, 2009). This additional time would enhance classroom management skills which is an area in which newly certified teachers are said to struggle (Authier, 2012; Ryan 2010). Admittedly, working as an ST or LT occasional teacher can provide newly certified teachers with much needed experience in the classroom as well as compel new teachers to learn a variety of management strategies in order to survive in the world of occasional teaching. Occasional teaching, both STO and LTO, however, does not appear to provide new teachers with a complete picture of the “teaching experience.” Occasional teachers are not given the many responsibilities and challenges experienced by their permanent colleagues (Damianos, 2012). Non-permanent teachers prepare differently, often lack rapport with school and local teachers, and may lack expertise in key areas such as classroom management.

There are even more challenges for occasional teachers. Because of their extended time waiting for permanent teaching employment, (LT/ST) occasional teachers must find ways to remain current and prepared for the realities of being a permanent teacher.

Some occasional teachers (LT) are more fortunate and are provided with support and professional development (online and face-to-face) by the schools and boards they are employed by. Many STO teachers who do not receive such support from their schools and boards must participate in various forms of formal and informal learning, such as volunteering, at their own expense. We know that there are significant structural obstacles and imperfect regulations, such as 274/12 which establishes occasional teacher seniority (ST/LT) and a roster system which was meant to correct dysfunctional hiring practices in the teacher employment market (Elementary Teachers Federation). Yet, the regulation needs refinement (Ferguson et al., 2013).

Overall, the path taken by (ST/LT) occasional teachers during the gap is not predictable; although the path does lead to possible employment, there are no guarantees: “New teachers can face years of unpredictable and unreliable work, and will experience fierce competition for that work” (Saunders, 2013, p. 1). In order to be prepared for the possibility of permanent employment, there is much that occasional teachers can do, especially if the school boards they work for, and unions step up to provide the opportunities and take an interest in investing in these future teachers.

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